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REPORTS BY DIVISIONS AND GOVERNMENTS ON THE SITUATION IN THEIR REGIONS AND COUNTRIES AND ON THE PROGRESS MADE IN THE STANDARDIZATION OF GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES SINCE THE SIXTH CONFERENCE

National report of Australia

Paper submitted by Australia**

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1. Summary

The Committee for Geographical Names in Australia (CGNA) has a co-ordination role in Australian naming activities. Each Australian State and Territory is responsible for geographical naming and have legislation, policy and procedures to support the process.

The mission of the committee is to "Develop national standards and guidelines for geographical names to support the national spatial data infrastructure of Australia" (ASDI).

Its activities are reported to the Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM) of Australia and include activities from its biennial meetings.

Activities have included a National Gazetteer, Toponymic Guidelines, WWW information, indigenous place names, a national place names project, international liaison and the development of a strategic plan.

2. Introduction

This report covers the period since the Sixth United Nations Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names.

The role of the Australian States and Territories remains basic to the application and standardisation of names in Australia. Major restructuring of mapping agencies has occurred over the past few years but the functions of the naming groups has been maintained. An Executive Officer to the Committee for Geographical Names in Australia (CGNA) has been provided for the past 4 years.

3. Intergovernmental Committee on Surveying and Mapping (ICSM)

ICSM is the peak national body in Australia, with the responsibility for the coordination of Surveying and Mapping functions. It comprises the Surveyor General or their equivalents from the States and Territories, Commonwealth (AUSLIG), the Director of Army Survey, the Naval Hydrographer and New Zealand's Surveyor General and New Zealand's Chief Hydrographer. CGNA has been established as a permanent committee of ICSM.

4. Committee for Geographical Names in Australia (CGNA)

CGNA was formed in 1984 to fill a co-ordinating role in Australian naming activities. The chairman since late 1994 has been Mr. John Parker, the Surveyor-General of Victoria. The past Chairman Dr. John Atchison has continued his interest in toponymy.

The Committee for Geographic Names in Australia (CGNA) has as its mission:

"Develop national standards and guidelines for geographical names to support the national spatial data infrastructure of Australia".

CGNA's objectives include:-

- To act as an expert group that sets standards to maintain the integrity of the nation's geographical names.
- To provide a national focus through collaboration, co-ordination and consultation to ensure consistency in naming.
- To increase the knowledge of geographical naming issues in the community.
- To contribute to international activities by strengthening and continuing relationships, and
- To preserve the heritage and cultural values of geographical names.

Current activities of CGNA include:-

- issues relating to the "extent" of named geographical features'
- standards applicable to geographical naming including their abbreviation;
- issues relating to the updating of the national gazetteer for increased quality and content;
- preparation of glossary of generic terms;
- facilitating the completion of suburb and locality naming;
- investigating options for a "short gazetteer",
- development of a national consistent locality boundary dataset;
- preparation of papers for national and international conferences and for publication;
- identification of research projects;
- naming issues associated with Native Title.

Major achievements over the past 2 years are as follows:-

Biennial meetings

CGNA conducts biennial meetings of its members to discuss issues of common interest. Meetings were held in Wellington New Zealand in 1992, Ballarat, Victoria in 1994 and in Hobart Tasmania in 1996. The key address at the 1994 meeting was given by Ms Helen Kerfoot, Secretary of the Canadian Permanent Committee on Geographical Names.

National Gazetteer

A Gazetteer has been produced from the information held by each of the State and Territory naming authorities. This Gazetteer is currently available in ASCII text file format to permit users to load the data to the PC based databases and import to more substantial databases.

The gazetteer when completed consisted of over 210,000 records and for distribution purposes the data was then separated to three themes of infrastructure, land and water features. These themes were further split to States and Territory files together with a file of offshore features supplied by the Naval Hydrographer making a total of 25 files on six diskettes in delimited text file format.

Toponymic Guidelines

Meetings for the members of CGNA have enabled a guideline paper titled "Toponymic Guidelines for Australia" to be produced. This guideline complies with a decision of the Fifth United Nations Conference on the Standardisation of Geographical Names in 1987 that each member nation formulate a set to Toponymic Guidelines suitable for its own use.

WWW Information

An information page about the functions of CGNA is available for viewing on the World Wide Web. The address of this page is http://www.anzlic.gov.au/icsm/cgnamain.htm . This page is continually updated as new information is available. This source will be used in place of the newsletter previously produced by CGNA and will become more viable with more of the members of CGNA having access to the WWW.

Indigenous Place Names

The collection and verification of Aboriginal names has become one of the major issues of naming practice in Australia. Resources are being allocated to the naming of features with Aboriginal names and maps are to be produced with dual naming of features. Guidelines have been developed by CGNA for the recording and use of these names.

National Place Names Project

This project was initially proposed by the University of New England and did not proceed due to the lack of finance. The revival of this project is currently under investigation and the support of the historic community may see a plan of action developed to proceed the project. It is planned to devolve the activities of the collection of material to regional groups and have an overall co-ordinator of the project for the storing of information. This information will be then made available by the WWW.

5. State and Territory Names Authorities

The State and Territory names authorities have responsibility for all Australian naming activities apart from Norfolk Island, undersea features and Antarctica.

Generally the Secretary of each of the States and Territory authorities is the representative on CGNA. The State and Territory naming authorities are long established and have developed efficient practices, policies and procedures for the collection of geographical names. Some jurisdictions have reviewed their legislation.

6. International Activities

CGNA through its Chairman currently provide the Chairman of the United Nations Group of Experts on Geographical Names for Asia, South East and Pacific South West Division. It is planned that Australia will host the next meeting of the Division during 1998.

The Toponymic Training Course that was proposed to be held in Darwin, Australia in mid 1997 and was being co-ordinated by CGNA unfortunately had to be cancelled due to lack of attendees.

7. Conclusion

The collection and use of Aboriginal names will have a greater influence in the production of maps and CGNA will endeavour to co-ordinate the collection and use of these names. CGNA will continue to support the Australian Spatial Data Infrastructure.

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